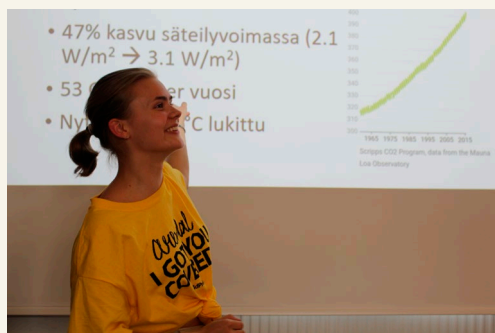


The unknown truth below the surface of consumerism

In the late 20th and the 21st century we, the homo sapiens, have adapted a mindless consumerist lifestyle in the very highly and highly developed countries. We purchase items, such as clothes and gadgets, for “wants” and not “needs”. As obvious as it might sound, everything that we consume has to be created, extracted or produced. Most often this requires the burning of fossil fuels, the core drivers of climate change. But for us high consumers, a 5€ t-shirt in Primark appears as if it grew from the ground because we have not witnessed the environmental damage for ourselves. Instead of paying attention, we keep on humming Madonna’s “Material Girl” while shopping in the realm of fast fashion and never question the contribution of a tangible product to such an abstract complexity like climate change.



Let us delve deeper into clothes: Research, conducted by the Continental Clothing Co. Ltd and certified by The Carbon Trust, studied various pieces of clothing and their total lifespan from the creation of the fabric to its disposal. A single t-shirt produced by standard grid electricity emits 6.34 kg of CO₂, including embedded emissions and consumer-

use -phase emissions. Approximately two-thirds of its emissions originate from the “raw materials and manufacturing” phase. In contrast to a t-shirt that is produced in the EarthPositive supply chain (using renewable energy), the percentage of CO₂ emitted plummets to 15%. In all honesty, 6.34 kg of CO₂ alone is not much considering the 43 billion tonnes of global CO₂ emissions emitted in 2018 . But to provide perspective, this abstract amount can be translated into house mice. If the comparison is made to the average adult mouse weighing 19 grams, purchasing five standard t-shirts a year would mean that you share your home with 1668 of them.



The production and the embedded emissions of such a simple thing as a cotton t-shirt is a perfect illustration of our economic system. If we persist in making individual alterations in order to mitigate our personal carbon footprint, by either being plant-based, cycling to work or school, keeping the lights off or investing in Earth-Positive t-shirts, the global system will not change significantly. “You can make a big difference!” is a partial truth at best. The global economy has been constructed by human beings in such a way that investing in a low carbon lifestyle is financially difficult for many and could potentially drive businesses and microeconomies into

bankruptcy. But the beauty of our carbon crisis is the fact that all of it is human-made. This way, unlike the laws of nature that exist beyond the human mind, our system is artificial and thus, it can be changed.

The relationship between information and change

In order to achieve change we need to start by being mindful of our consumption on every level possible and demanding new, affirming legislation. We consumers are constantly being fed by advertisements claiming that a company’s brand new product is a must-have. This propaganda brainwashes us into harnessing, buying and owning material things. After all, everyone subconsciously yearns for an ostentatious lifestyle because only then you are considered “successful” and “admirable”. Due to this reality, our present consumption pattern is firmly ingrained in us but we, as a population, can challenge that. However, the question of how we can individually contact governments and politicians and persuade those in power to change our legislation is more difficult.

I recently hosted a discussion about the very fundamental facts about climate change for a Finnish association called “Martat”. As I was progressing with my PowerPoint presentation, one audience member asked a question, breaking the utter silence, which then ultimately escalated into an enthusiastic conversation amongst the whole audience. When the topic changed into high consumerism, a woman suddenly turned towards me and asked: “Is this all made to blame us?” At first, I did not quite absorb what she meant by that remark, but only afterwards it really sunk in with me. I was not angry at the woman, but rather empathetic about her point of view: she had never in

her life known the truth about how much the Western and Northern people consume. But if she did not know, how many others like her are still out there?

With information comes sagacity and with that a possibility to utilise it. The woman has now gained knowledge as she is one fact richer than she was before she posed the question. She is a great example of how vital information is for mindfulness: if no one knew about the critical state that the human civilisation is submerging in, change would not occur. For something new to be born, the old state of humanity cannot remain the same. This concept has to be the catalyst for the necessary legal alterations that we need to confront.

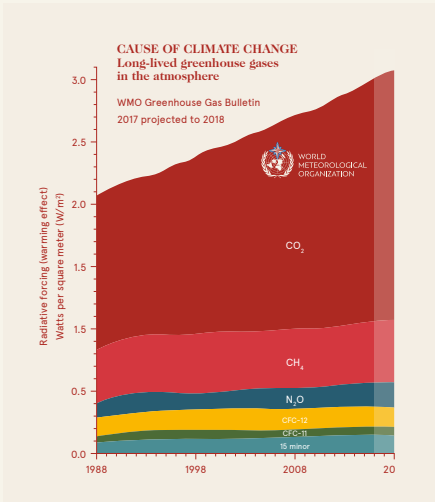
Responsibility over blame

Returning to the initial question that the woman asked, the answer is no. The fact that very highly developed countries have about 30 times higher consumption emissions than low-developed countries², and that they consume an average 23.5 tonnes of material things per year (which is 10 times the amount of the consumption of low-developed countries), is not done to blame anyone. Blaming only invests our precious time into negativity instead of contributing to genuine actions targeting the problem itself. The numbers are there to show us the truth, that being the lack of responsibility that us highly developed nations with soaring consumerism levels are not willing to face. From my own point of view, I used to love shopping, whether it was fast fashion or useless Ikea furniture. I had a habit of leaving the lights on in the whole house and continuing to charge my phone despite it being fully charged. In all honesty, I did not know better back then and after learning the truth I blamed myself. The feelings of abhorrence and repulsion I had towards myself and my family that kept on overconsuming, started festering in my mind. I became outraged. But that anger did not lead me to a better place. It was only after accepting my responsibility that I was able to begin mindful meditation and developing a minimalist, low-consumerist mindset.

Our right to know

I still do not meet the criteria of an ideal low-consumerist profile. My life is so deeply embedded into the economic and financial reality of this era that I still consider myself as an excessive consumer. However, the turning point in this short life of mine

has been education. There is so much that is unknown to the public that needs to be addressed. For instance, a pivotal graph produced by the World Meteorological Organization (on the right) clearly indicates that our emissions keep on increasing, and thus the warming effect proliferating in numbers as we hankering homo sapiens



keep on guzzling more individual power, more material things and more energy. This graph is one of the fundamental but substantial pieces of the bigger, forgotten truth – and yet, it is not shown to the public eye. The complexity of the science behind climate change is an utterly invalid excuse not to inform the global population about the unimaginable disaster that lies ahead of us. Our right to know the truth has been seized by our world-leading politicians due to fear, greed and the lingering uncertainty of people's reactions and opinions. But climate change is not an opinion. It is an

environmental catastrophe and a violation of our rights and our moral principles. Denying the truth will not change it and leaving the problem untouched will only bring even more devastation. We human beings have a right to know our reality and a right to challenge our very own legal, political and economic system. We have a right to act and react, and the right and responsibility to ignite change.

Vappu Väinänen, Finnish, Aged 17.